

Plains Depot  
Northwest corner of Hudson and Main streets  
Plains  
Sumter County  
Georgia

HABS No. GA-2209

HABS  
GA,  
131- PLAIN,  
15-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HABS  
GA,  
131-PLAIN  
15-

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### PLAINS DEPOT

HABS No. GA-2209

Location: Northwest corner of Hudson and Main streets, Plains, Sumter County, Georgia.

USGS Plains, Georgia Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator  
Coordinates: Zone 16, N 3546885 E 746080.

Present Owner/Occupant: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service owns the structure: M. L. Hudson's descendants still own the land.

Present Use: Office and visitor's center for the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site.

Significance: Although architecturally modest, the wood-frame depot was the significant factor in the founding of Plains. When the railroad was built in 1885, the towns of Magnolia Springs and the Plain of Dura were moved and consolidated around the site of the depot. More recently, the depot was used as Jimmy Carter's headquarters during his 1976 presidential campaign.

#### PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

##### A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1889-90. Although the Americus, Preston and Lumpkin Railroad was constructed in 1885, the depot was not built until after the railroad was sold to the Savannah, Americus and Montgomery Railroad in 1888. The Americus Weekly Recorder (May 23, 1890) reported that the structure was completed in May 1890.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The following is a chain of title to the land and structure as well as rights of way. Records are from the Clerk's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia.
  - 1884 Deed July 29, 1884, recorded April 2, 1885, Deed Book U, page 382. M.L. Hudson right-of-way to J.S. and A.B. Clark of the Americus, Preston and Lumpkin (AP&L) Railroad.
  - 1888 December 26, 1888. AP&L changed to Savannah, Americus and Montgomery Railroad.
  - 1895 Deeds August 1895, Deed Book Z, pages 611-620. S.H. Hawkins, President of the Savannah, Americus and Montgomery Railroad to Georgia and Alabama Railroad.
  - 1902 Deed February 20, 1902, recorded February 20, 1902, Deed Book

FF, pages 218-223. Georgia and Alabama Railroad to Seaboard Air Line Railway.

1986 July 26, CSX Corporation (formerly Seaboard Railroad) donated the structure to the Plains Historic Preservation Trust Inc.

1988 February 31, the Plains Historical Preservation Trust Inc. donated the structure to the National Park Service.

3. Original plans and construction: No original plans have been located. A plan for a proposed addition of passenger waiting rooms to the existing depot is dated September 29, 1911. The plan indicates that at the time the depot had a full deck along the south facade.
4. Alterations and additions: In 1911, an approximately 24'-0" x 36'-0" passenger-waiting area was proposed for the east side of the depot. The plan shows the original depot with the proposed additions. Before the addition, it consisted of the loading dock, warehouse, and a 8'-0" x 21'-0" baggage room on the east side. The additions were to include a 40'-0" x 10'-0" office east of the baggage room and two segregated waiting rooms; a 18'-0" x 24'-0" "colored" section on the south side with two windows on the south and an exterior door on the east and a "white" section with one window on the east, two on the north, an exterior door on the north, and a door on the west wall to the office. Two ticket windows on the east wall of the office open into each of the waiting areas. The waiting rooms were removed in 1951 when the railroad discontinued passenger service, but the north two-thirds of the office are extant.

- B. Historical Context: The city of Plains owes its existence to the construction of a railroad between Americus and Lumpkin. The Weekly Sumter Republican reported that when the group of entrepreneurs completed plans for this railroad in July 1884, "the announcement was greeted with rapture and long and continued plaudits; and a resolution to build the railroad was passed unanimously amidst great enthusiasm . . . This railroad will be a great throbbing pulse through which must flow the warm lifeblood of social and financial prosperity."<sup>1</sup> The Americus Preston and Lumpkin (AP&L) Railroad was to cost a total of \$85,000 with Americus raising \$42,000.<sup>2</sup> An advertisement placed by H.L. Collier for railroad contractors to build the line appeared in a county newspaper in August of that year. The 37 mile narrow-gauge railroad was completed March 1 1886 and residents of Magnolia Springs, Lebanon, the Plain of Dura, and Bottsford began moving to property owned by Milton

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<sup>1</sup> The Weekly Sumter Republican, July 25, 1884.

<sup>2</sup> The Weekly Sumter Republican, August 1, 1884.

Leander Hudson and Carey Cox near the tracks.<sup>3</sup> In 1888, the AP&L Railroad was absorbed by the Savannah Americus and Montgomery Railroad (SA&M), run by S.H. Hawkins, and the track was changed to broad gauge. In December 1888, SA&M announced that Plains would become a transfer station for all goods being shipped west, and the Americus Weekly Recorder enthused "we extend a cordial welcome to the broad gauge."<sup>4</sup> With the broad gauge a period of growth came to the new settlement. By 1890, for the convenience of the new businesses in the town, the "of Dura" was dropped and Plains became the official appellation of the town. Construction of the depot probably began about this time because by May 1890, Weekly Recorder reported, "The new depot is now completed and helps the look of the town considerably."<sup>5</sup>

Soon after the completion of the depot, however, SA&M entered receivership and was sold to the newly formed Georgia and Alabama Railway (GA&A) in 1895. The deed of sale included all track, equipment, and structures for the railway that went from Abbeville through Wilcox, Dooly, Sumter, Webster, and Stewart counties to Savannah.<sup>6</sup> On July 1, 1900, the Seaboard Air Line railway gained control of GA&A through stock ownership and the railroad property and franchises were sold to Seaboard on February 20, 1902.<sup>7</sup> Between 1902 and the present, the railroad has undergone a series of mergers and consolidations, including name changes from the Seaboard Air Line Railway Company to the Seaboard Coast Line Railroad Company, to the Seaboard Family Line, to the Seaboard System Railroad, and finally to the Chessie Seaboard Corporation (CSX), which it remains today. In 1986, the depot was donated to the Plains Historical Preservation Trust Inc., which then donated it to the National Park Service.

Before the Depression, several freight and passenger trains ran through Plains each day, carrying watermelons, corn, peanuts, grain, beans, hay, tobacco, sugarcane, peaches, pecans, cotton and livestock. A train known as the Butthead made two daily deliveries of mail. The depot was expanded around 1911, with the addition of segregated passenger-waiting rooms. In 1919, seventy-six cars of hogs and cows were shipped from Plains, the largest number from any U.S. city that year, and in 1920-21, cotton receipts showed that 6,000 to 10,000 bales of cotton were shipped from Plains.<sup>8</sup> Town commerce revolved around the trains and the Main Street businesses, such as the Oliver-McDonald Furniture Company which shipped its merchandise throughout the state by way

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<sup>3</sup> Mrs. H.A. Carter, A History of the Railroad in Plains, Georgia, 1986.

<sup>4</sup> Americus Weekly Recorder, December 20, 1888.

<sup>5</sup> Americus Weekly Recorder, May 23, 1890.

<sup>6</sup> Deed Book Z, p. 611.

<sup>7</sup> Deed Book FF, pp. 218-23.

<sup>8</sup> Carter, 1986.

of rail. When the Wise Hospital was in operation, from the 1910s until the mid 1930s, patients and nurses made the journey to Plains by rail. The hospital also served the railroad, providing care on several occasions for passengers and rail workers injured in railroad accidents. Passenger service was discontinued in 1951 and the two-room segregated waiting area was dismantled.

When the trains ceased to stop in Plains, the depot was leased to various business concerns as a storage facility. The Carter Peanut Warehouse leased the structure in the 1970s, and when Jimmy Carter decided to run for president, it was used as his Plains campaign headquarters. Carter had used his peanut warehouse building on Main Street (see HABS No. GA-2216) as his gubernatorial campaign headquarters, and his national headquarters for the presidential election was located in Atlanta. As the world became aware of "Jimmy Who" from Plains, however, tourists and wellwishers began flooding the town. The depot was chosen as a local focus for the campaign because of its symbolic significance and, as Maxine Reese, campaign director of the third congressional district, said, "It was the largest building available downtown that had a bathroom." After years of neglect, preparation of the building for its new status involved much manpower. Jimmy Carter's brother, Billy, and John Pope of Americus, with the help of many Plains citizens, cleaned out the old depot and painted it white with "Carter" green trim. The surrounding grounds were covered with gravel because "We didn't have time to bother with mowing the lawn," said Reese, and many residents recall with amusement the gravel truck toppling into the septic tank during those frantic days of preparation. All the materials and labor were donated, and after the depot was officially opened as campaign headquarters on Easter Sunday 1976, it was entirely staffed by volunteers. The warehouse section was partitioned into offices, and soon professionals from the Atlanta office were sent to Plains to handle the volume of mail coming into the tiny town. Jimmy Carter's mother, Lillian, would sit in the depot in a rocking chair greeting visitors and signing autographs, and Rosalynn's mother, Allie Smith, was among the volunteers who worked at the front desk. Every time Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter would return to Plains from the campaign trail, the townspeople would gather at the station, no matter what hour, to greet their native son. Reese admitted that the main reason for these planned events was to capture the attention of the media camped out in trailers under the water tower in the makeshift "TV City." Reese contends it was this continued publicity that helped to convert Carter from "Jimmy Who" to the Democratic presidential candidate. Reese said she even had the train schedule altered so as not to have any of these publicity events interrupted. On election eve 1976, hundreds of people gathered around the depot to watch the returns come in. A large television screen was erected near the pharmacy, and bonfires were lit in barrels to warm the excited crowd. Local high school band members were camped out in buses and Reese had ordered 144 green T-shirts emblazoned with "Jimmy Won '76" in anticipation of the Carter victory.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Maxine Reese, 1989 interview.

On 19 January 1977, the day before Carter's inauguration, the depot was used once again for its intended use, as more than 100 campaigners and fans boarded an eighteen-car Amtrak train bound for Washington, D.C.'s Union Station; it was the first time the tracks had been used for passenger transport since 1951. So certain was she that Carter would win, Reese called Amtrak to arrange for the \$80,000 lease of the train in summer 1976. As the train made its way up the coast, many gathered to watch it pass; the British Broadcasting Company documented the trip on videotape.<sup>10</sup>

While Carter was in office, the depot remained a popular tourist stop where souvenirs were sold. Because Carter's 1980 presidential campaign was based in Washington, D.C., the depot was not used again as a campaign headquarters. It is currently the visitor's center and museum for the Jimmy Carter National Historic Site.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This modest, wood-frame depot is in keeping with the traditional depot form: a one-story, rectangular structure aside the railroad tracks. It represents turn-of-the-century vernacular styling and has no outstanding design features.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: A typical train station structure, the depot is a one-story rectangular building with irregular bays. It is approximately 24' wide and 80'-2" long, divided into three sections: the office on the east end, a 40' warehouse in the center, and a 22'-9" open shed area to the west. It is an asymmetrical side-facing plan with an 11'-2"-wide projecting bay on the north side of the office nearest the tracks for the sighting of trains.
2. Foundations: Historically, brick piers and round wood posts with hewn joists. These have been reinforced with the addition of concrete blocks.
3. Walls: Horizontal weatherboards clad the office section while the warehouse-area walls are vertical board and batten. The walls have been painted white; corner framing, window framing, and doors are painted dark green. A green vertical post on the south facade visually separates the office and warehouse areas.

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<sup>10</sup> Reese, M. 1989 interview.

4. Structural System, framing: Wood frame.
5. Raised platform deck: The two-bay raised platform deck extends 22'-9" from the covered warehouse and its floor is constructed of 8"-wide tongue-and-groove boards running east to west, parallel to the tracks. This platform is extended 7'-3" north and 7'-8" south by abutting platforms that correspond with the gable roof. The total width of the platform is 35'-2" at the west end. The flanking platform on the north side runs almost the entire length of the warehouse, while the platform on the south runs east along the warehouse about 12'. The platform area is entirely open and features two long back-to-back benches running parallel to the track.
6. Chimneys: One small parged brick chimney served a pot-belly stove that historically sat in the southeast corner of the office.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: A new metal and glass door at the easternmost corner of the south facade leads to the office. A double-door entrance to the office from the north side has been covered over with boards. Two large sliding freight doors open the far west end of the warehouse section on the north and south sides of the building. The freight door on the south facade is constructed of board and batten identical to the walls of the warehouse. The freight door on the north is constructed of tongue-and-groove wood. Both of these doors and the blocked door on the north side of the office are painted dark green.
  - b. Windows: Only one window exists in the warehouse section of the station and it is a fixed six-light sash about 10' from the ground at the east end of the south wall of the warehouse section. West of the office door on the south facade are two slightly stepped windows. The north facade has two windows facing north in the protruding bay of the office area. Narrower windows on the side walls of the bay face east and west. Together, they form a viewing bay from which approaching trains could be sighted from within the office. In addition to the narrow window at the far north end of the east facade, there is a window about 4' from the south side. All windows in the office area are six-over-six-light double-hung wood sash, except for the narrow openings in the sides of the bay which are four-over-four-light double-hung sash. The windows throughout have white painted wood muntins and green trim.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The low-pitch gable roof has a cross gable at the east office end and is clad with shingles.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The roof has normal eaves over the office section and very wide eaves over the warehouse and platform area. The principal rafters on the east and north gable are painted green to match the rest of the trim, as is the fascia that extends across the eave over the office section. The first rafter to extend out from the wide eaves over the warehouse and platform is also painted green on its east face. The wide eaves over the warehouse and platform are open, with exposed notched-end rafters. In all, thirty-one roof rafters are exposed. Five chamfered brackets extend from the north and south walls of the warehouse to the eaves. Two more chamfered brackets extend on each side from the piers that support the roof over the covered porch.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The office encompasses the far eastern quarter of the structure. On the west wall of the office is a book display. A wood counter with two drawers runs across the north wall of the office under the four train sighting windows. A doorway on the west wall of the office leads to a small vestibule that contains a large display case placed against the double doors that once opened to the tracks. The south half of this vestibule is set off by a curtain, behind which is a bathroom. The warehouse encompasses the west two thirds of the enclosure. It is now used as a museum and houses several large display cases, Lillian's rocking chairs and other Carter paraphernalia.
2. Stairways: Three steps lead from the vestibule up to the warehouse area. Thin wood poles on dowels serve as handrails.
3. Flooring: The office and small adjacent vestibule are covered with green wall-to-wall carpeting. The warehouse flooring is the same as that of the outdoor platform, east-to-west running tongue-and-groove boards; it is worn in places. The bathroom is modern sheet linoleum.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls of the office and vestibule are plaster painted cream. In the warehouse, more of the original wallboards are missing than remain, and the heavy vertical and diagonal support beams are visible, as well as the exterior weatherboarding. In some places, insulation is also visible. The original walls appear to have been narrow tongue-and-groove boards painted green.



5. Doorways and doors: A hollow-core flush door leads to the bathroom; a wood tongue-and-groove door leads to the warehouse.
6. Decorative features and trim: The office area has a green wood chair rail and green trim around the windows and door.
7. Hardware: The large doors on the north and south walls of the warehouse are hung on metal rollers that slide over a metal track above the door opening.
8. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: The office section is cooled by a window-unit air conditioner. The warehouse area has no cooling system and retains heat despite a small vent in the west gable.
  - b. Lighting: Ceiling lightbulbs and fluorescent strips illuminate the interior. The structure was historically lit by lanterns.
  - c. Plumbing: The bathroom has a sink and toilet that operates off a septic tank.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The station runs parallel to the tracks in the center of the small town. The main entrance is on the south side.
2. Outbuildings: Two wood-frame standing-seam metal sheds on brick foundations and two metal silos are located west of the depot along the tracks.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original Architectural Drawings: A plan that includes the extant depot and proposed additions to the depot, dated September 29, 1911, are located at Andersonville National Historic Site, Andersonville, Georgia.
- B. Early Views: A U. S. Department of Agriculture aerial photograph from 1948 shows the roofline of the depot before the passenger waiting rooms were dismantled. Aerial photographs of Plains are also at the Andersonville National Historic Site.
- C. Interviews:

Maxine Reese, campaign director, third congressional district, Jimmy Carter

Presidential Campaign. Interview by Elizabeth Barthold, September 5, 1989, Plains, Georgia.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

"A History of the Railroad in Plains, Georgia," as told by Mrs. H. A. Carter Sr. July 26, 1986 (copyright 1986 by Mrs. Hugh Carter)

Deed Books are from the Clerk's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia.

2. Secondary and published sources:

"Plains," The Americus Weekly Recorder, May 23, 1890.

"Plains of Dura," The Americus Weekly Recorder, December 20, 1888.

"The AP&L Railroad Subscription Completed: The Work of Grading to Begin at Once," The Weekly Sumter Republican, Friday, July 25, 1884.

"Success at Last: The AP&L Railroad a Certainty," The Weekly Sumter Republican, August 1, 1884.

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